

CRS Report for Congress

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Military Funeral Honors: Frequently Asked Questions

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Summary

This report is written in response to commonly asked questions about military funeral honors. It provides information on the eligibility criteria, required components of the honor detail, and the funeral ceremony. It also cites legislation that mandates that the Department of Defense (DOD) make military funeral honors available to every eligible veteran upon request. This report will be updated as needed. For related reading, see CRS Report RS20396, *Military Funeral Honors for U.S. Veterans: Increasing Demands on the Department of Defense*.

What Are Military Funeral Honors?

The Department of Defense (DOD) defines military funeral honors as “the ceremonial paying of respect and the final demonstration of the country’s gratitude to those who, in times of war and peace, have faithfully defended our Nation.” Members of the funeral honors detail fold and present the American flag to the veteran’s survivor and Taps is sounded.¹

What Legislation Provides for the Implementation of the Current Military Funeral Honors Program?

Section 578 of P.L. 106-65, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2000, enacted October 5, 1999, sets out the requirements for funeral honors.²

¹ Department of Defense Directive 1300.15, “Military Funeral Support,” Jan. 11, 2001, at http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/d130015_011101/d130015p.pdf.

² 10 U.S.C. 1491.

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What Agency Is Responsible for Administering the Military Funeral Honors Program?

The Department of Defense is responsible for providing military honors to eligible veterans. DOD Directive 1300.15 updates policy and responsibilities for military funeral support. DOD has established a website that provides information including eligibility criteria, the text of relevant legislation, information for funeral directors, and related links, at [<http://www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil>]. Questions or comments regarding the program can be addressed to Military Funeral Honors, 9504 IH-35 North, Suite 320, San Antonio, TX 78233-6635.

Who Is Eligible for Military Funeral Honors?

Military members in the following categories are eligible for military funeral honors: military personnel on active duty; former members who served on active duty and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable (as described below); members of the Selected Reserve; former members of the Selected Reserve who served at least one term of enlistment or period of initial obligated service and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable; and former members of the Selected Reserve who were discharged due to a service-related disability.³

Who Is Ineligible for Military Funeral Honors?

Veterans are ineligible if they are convicted of federal or state capital offenses and sentenced to life imprisonment without parole or receive the death penalty. They are also ineligible if they were discharged from the military under dishonorable conditions. These conditions include dishonorable discharge, bad conduct discharge, dismissal from the service awarded by court-martial, other than honorable conditions discharge, and for officers, resignation for the good of the service in lieu of courts-martial, which results in a discharge characterization of other than honorable conditions.

What Is the Required Composition of a Military Funeral Honors Detail?

At the minimum, a funeral honors detail consists of two members of the Armed Forces, at least one of which is a member of the veteran's military service.

Funeral honors details may be augmented with volunteers who are military veterans and who are members of veterans' service organizations, such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, or other appropriate organizations. The Authorized Provider Partnership Program (AP3) was established to provide training for these

³ According to CRS Report RL30802, *Reserve Component Personnel Issues: Questions and Answer*, "The Selected Reserve contains units and individuals most essential to wartime missions, in accordance with the national security strategy. They have priority over other reservists for training and equipment. Members of the Selected Reserve are generally required to perform one weekend of training each month ('inactive duty for training' or IDT, also known as 'weekend drill') and two weeks of training each year ('annual training' or AT, sometimes known colloquially as 'summer camp') for which they receive pay and benefits."

volunteers to standardize the quality of the honors rendered. Volunteers can participate as firing party members, pallbearers, and buglers, among other duties. When a trained bugler is not available, a recorded version of Taps may be played. DOD also approved the use of a ceremonial bugle, which contains a device in the bell of the bugle that plays a recorded version of Taps.

Who Is Responsible for Making the Arrangements for Honors to Be Performed?

Honors are not performed automatically; they must be requested. Families of eligible veterans must request funeral honors through their funeral director. The funeral director will contact the appropriate military service to arrange for the funeral honors detail.

Are Members of the Military Honors Detail Paid?

Members of the Ready Reserve⁴ or retired military personnel who are part of a military funeral detail may receive pay, allowances, travel, and transportation reimbursements.⁵ Ready Reserve personnel may also receive service credit for performing this duty.⁶ Survivors are not charged for these services.

Section 571 of P.L. 107-314, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2003, enacted December 2, 2002, provides for a flat rate daily stipend for members of the funeral honors detail who are not active duty military personnel. The daily stipend for FY2004 is \$50. The *U.S. Code* provides at 10 U.S.C. 1491(A) that at the discretion of the secretary of a military department, such members of the funeral honors detail may be reimbursed for transportation and other expenses incidental to participation in the ceremony in lieu of receiving a flat rate daily stipend.

Is There Any Federal Money for Uniforms and Equipment for Volunteers Who Participate in Military Honors Details?

At the discretion of the secretary of a military department, uniforms, materiel, equipment, and training may be provided to members of veterans' service and other appropriate organizations. Volunteers seeking reimbursement should complete DOD Standard Form 1164 and submit it to the unit with which they are volunteering.

⁴ Ibid., "The Ready Reserve consists of the Selected Reserve, described above, plus the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). The IRR consists of individual reservists who are currently not required to train regularly, are not paid, and are not members of units — however, they can be required to train regularly by their service, and can be called to active duty involuntarily in time of national emergency declared by the President — i.e., congressional action is not required."

⁵ 37 U.S.C. 435.

⁶ 10 U.S.C. 12732(a)(2)(E).

What Military Honors Are Afforded to Individuals Interred or Inurned at Arlington National Cemetery?

Eligibility criteria for interment or inurnment can be obtained from the Arlington National Cemetery website at [<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org>], or from the Internment Services Office at (703) 607-8585. Once eligibility is determined, honors are afforded according to rank. Enlisted personnel receive standard honors and a firing party. Commissioned and warrant officers receive standard honors, a firing party, and may request the caisson and escort troops. Those individuals who are eligible for inurnment in the Columbarium receive the standard honors and a firing party. All may request a military chaplain to preside over the services. Additional details are available at [http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/funeral_information/guide.atneed.html#honors].